Defending God is a collection of articles related to theodicy. This theme has been a lifelong challenge to Crenshaw, according to his own words; he did not choose theodicy, but experiences of life guided him to study wisdom texts, especially the relation of God’s mercy and justice. Crenshaw is a well-known expert and a writer of a wide variety of articles, introductions, and commentaries about wisdom literature. He clearly knows the theme as well as he knows his own pockets; this is also obvious when one reads the large bibliography (even when it is a select bibliography) and detailed footnotes.

According to the preface, most of the articles included were written for professional meetings and conferences. This background gives a clear structure but also some limitations. The chapters are relatively short and are often built on the same structure. An introduction, with research questions to be solved, is usually followed by less than half a dozen exegetical analyses and some concluding statements. None of the chapters is remarkably large in its contents. However, every chapter contains the span of a whole story in itself.

Crenshaw makes clear in a short statement that his view is most often synchronic and not diachronic. The latter, he assumes, leads to hazarding solutions with an evolutionary
timeline. On the other hand, Crenshaw notices that major national crises in 587 B.C.E. (destruction of the temple), in 170 B.C.E. (persecution of Antiochus), and in 70 C.E. (destruction of Jerusalem) “contributed to the emergence of new ways of dealing with theodicy.” However, most of the analyses of the book are located between 587 B.C.E. and 170 B.C.E., thus being in some sense diachronic in their approach. At least the origin of apocalyptic texts is explained using a diachronic view.

The book contains three sections, but above all it is a book of eleven chapters (see below for the table of contents). In these chapters several psalms are analyzed (e.g., Pss 10; 14; 80; 82), as well as main sections of the book of Job. Special attention is given to major themes such as the relation of mercy and justice, the meaning and role of Satan, and suffering as atonement (Isa 53). One of the major themes in several chapters is the relation of sin and punishment (Job, historiography in the Hebrew Bible). The dissident role of Ecclesiastes is also analyzed from this point of view. Finally, the analyses are concentrated on the origin of the hope of the resurrection, showing its roots in legends of Enoch and Elijah (taken by God) and that flourished during the Maccabean period.

The two last chapters, however, differ from rest of the book. The earlier chapters keep the questions focused on biblical texts and historical themes. The last two chapters (ch. 11 and the conclusion) also open the door for moral questions about God-talk. In a deep and dense way Crenshaw opens up the discussion about the cruel, evil, and wrong sides of God. “In short, the Bible describes God as cruel; of that there can be no doubt” (180) If these questions had been raised in the middle of the previously analyzed texts, they could be even more powerful, but even now they leave the reader to struggle with the morality of biblical concepts of God.

Crenshaw loves to build a detailed frame, to give nuanced analyses, and he offers some key answers to the reader. The whole story is more like a beautiful collection of flowers rather than a filet on a butcher’s slab, which is finely sliced. Crenshaw knows how to write (by hand, of course [viii]) and creates verbal fireworks to be enjoyed by native speakers.

Some follow-up comments can now be added. The question of theodicy became a burning issue globally due to the tsunami. In Finland, God-talk also got some space in the secular media and even more so in the church-related media. A peculiar question in Finnish media was the trend to abandon the Deuteronomistic worldview, especially the relation between sin and suffering. This also meant that the (mostly abandoned) Deuteronomistic view was understood to be the major model of the Hebrew Bible. On the other hand, the dialogues of Job were favored, as well as some of the psalms of lamentation, as a basic attitude to interpret the disaster (lament in front of the Creator). This example shows the meaning of moral criticism when biblical texts are used in a
current context. In this sense readers will hope that Crenshaw will continue his work of analyzing the moral dimensions of theodicy.

Another question was also raised due to the tsunami. How do mercy and justice relate to power, especially to the notion of God as Almighty? As Crenshaw notices, “the shift from polytheism to henotheism and ultimately to monotheism has not had an entirely salutary effect” (193). Could/should the process where the creator of life and protector of a few people became the ruler of nations (well documented also in Hebrew Bible) be studied in this connection too? The process whereby El Shaddai becomes Almighty naturally goes far beyond the Hebrew Bible, but the origin of the process can be seen there.

Reading the book left me without one answer (or perhaps I missed the point). Why is the title *Defending God*? Struggling with theodicy means an analysis of cultural concepts in their biblical context. Research can hardly defend God or fight against God but can clarify each historical and current view as clearly as possible. Those who have any interest in wrestling with questions of theodicy cannot ignore Crenshaw’s work.

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